Lecture 9

COMMUNICATING VERBALLY

THE NATURE AND PURPOSES OF LANGUAGE

- **Language:**

a body of symbols (most commonly words) and the systems for their use in messages that are common to the people of the same speech community.

- **speech community**

a group of people who speak the same language (also called a language community).

- **words**

symbols used by a speech community to represent objects, ideas, and feelings.

- **Sapir–Whorf hypothesis**

- *a theory claiming that language influences perception.*

CHARACTERISTICS OF LANGUAGE

- Language is arbitrary
- Language is abstract
- Language is dynamic

PURPOSES OF LANGUAGE

Although language communities vary in the words they use and in their grammar and syntax systems, all languages serve the same purposes.

1. We use language to designate, label, define, and limit. So, when we identify music as "punk," we are differentiating it from other music labeled rap, rock, pop, indie, country, or R&B.

2. We use language to evaluate. Through language we convey positive or negative attitudes toward our subject.

PURPOSES OF LANGUAGE

3. We use language to discuss things outside our immediate experience.

Language lets us talk about ourselves, learn from others' experiences, share a common heritage, talk about past and future events, and communicate about people and things that are not present.

4. We use language to talk about language. We also use language to communicate about how we are communicating.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND MEANING

On the surface, the relationship between language and meaning seems perfectly clear: We select the correct words, structure them using the rules of syntax and grammar agreed upon by our speech community, and people will interpret our meanings correctly.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND MEANING

- **Semantics Meaning:** Derived from the words themselves and how they are arranged in a sentence.

- **Denotation** is the direct, explicit meaning a speech community formally gives a word—it is the meaning found in a dictionary.

- **Connotation**, the feelings or evaluations we associate with a word, may be even more important to our understanding of meaning than denotation.

GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING SEMANTICS

"Some nut almost got me a while ago"

"About 1:00 pm last Saturday afternoon, an older man in a banged-up Honda Civic ran through the red light at Calhoun and Clifton and came within inches of hitting my car while I was in the intersection waiting to turn left"

GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING SEMANTICS

- Use specific language
  - Her performance on the job was (good), (topnotch), (excellent), (superior)
- Use concrete language
  - A significant loss
  - Good attendance record
- Use familiar language
  - Ms. Smith's idiosyncrasies supply adequate justification for terminating her employment status.
- Use descriptive details and examples
  - We have found that young men are best for this work.
- Demonstrate linguistic sensitivity
  - When a customer needs service, it is his right to ask for it.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND MEANING

- **Pragmatics:** understanding the message related to its conversational context of it. Pragmatic meaning focuses on what people mean. So, Pragmatic meaning changes across speakers and situations.

- Speech Act: the utterance of a verbal message by a speaker and what it implies about how the listener should respond.

EXAMPLE: SPEECH ACTS:

- Phone Call 1:
  Harry: The car won't start.
  Katie: Sorry about that. I'll just take the bus.
- Phone Call 2:
  Harry: The car won't start.
  CSR: Where is the car sir? I'll send the tow truck right away.
- Phone Call 3:
  Harry: The car won't start.
  Previous owner of this cart: Wow, that never happened to me. But I told you I was selling the car "as is".

GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING PRAGMATICS

- Tell the truth

- Provide right amount of information

- Relate what you say to the topic being discussed

- Acknowledge when your message violates a guideline

- Assume the best first

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND MEANING

- Sociolinguistics: varies according to the norms of a particular culture or co-culture.

- Cultures assign meanings to specific words and combination of words. For example, in English, "pretty" is associated with female's beauty and "handsome" with men.

- All cultures also use idioms which are expressions whose meanings are different from the literal meaning associated with the words used in them.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND MEANING

- As a society absorbs immigrants who speak different languages and becomes more multicultural, the dominant group's language gradually absorbs some words from the languages of the immigrants. In English we use and understand what were once foreign words, such as *petite, siesta, kindergarten*, and *ciao*. Similarly, the slang a subgroup uses may eventually be appropriated by the larger speech community. For example, the African American slang terms for "girlfriend," *shorty,* or *boo*, are now used and understood by a more diverse group of American speakers.

CULTURAL AND GENDER INFLUENCES ON LANGUAGE USE

- In **low-context cultures**, like the United States and most northern European countries, messages are typically quite direct and language is very specific. Speakers say exactly what they mean, and the verbal messages are very explicit, with lots of details provided.

- In **high-context cultures**, like Latin American, Asian, and American Indian, what a speaker intends for you to understand from the verbal message depends heavily on the setting or context in which it is sent. So verbal messages in high-context cultures may be indirect, using more general and ambiguous language

IMPROVING LANGUAGE SKILLS

Regardless of whether we are conversing with a friend, working on a task force, or giving a speech, we should strive to use language in our messages that accurately conveys our meanings. We can improve our messages by choosing words that make our meaning clear, choosing language that makes our messages memorable, and choosing language that demonstrates linguistic sensitivity.

IMPROVING LANGUAGE SKILLS

- **Feminine Styles Of Language**

Use words of empathy and support, emphasize concrete and personal language, and show politeness and tentativeness in speaking.

- **Masculine Styles Of Language**

Use words of status and problem solving, emphasize abstract and general language, and show assertiveness and control in speaking.

IMPROVING LANGUAGE SKILLS

- **Specific Words**

words that clarify meaning by narrowing what is understood from a general category to a particular item or group within that category.

- **Concrete Words**

words that appeal to the senses and help us see, hear, smell, taste, or touch.

- **Precise Words**

words that narrow a larger category to a smaller group within that category.

IMPROVING LANGUAGE SKILLS

- **Dating Information**

specifying the time or time period that a fact was true or known to be true.

- **Indexing Generalizations**

the mental and verbal practice of acknowledging

the presence of individual differences when voicing generalizations.

USE LANGUAGE THAT MAKES YOUR MESSAGES MEMORABLE

- **Vivid Wording**

wording that is full of life, vigorous, bright, and intense.

- **Simile**

a direct comparison of dissimilar things.

- **Metaphor**

a comparison that establishes a figurative identity between objects being compared.

IMPROVING LANGUAGE SKILLS

- **Emphasis** is the importance you give to certain words or ideas. Emphasis tells listeners what they should seriously pay attention to. Ideas are emphasized through proportion of time, repetition, and transitions.

USE LINGUISTIC SENSITIVITY

Linguistic sensitivity means choosing language and symbols that demonstrate respect for your listener(s). Through appropriate language, we communicate our respect for those who are different from us.

1. **Adapt your vocabulary to the level of your listener.**
2. **Use jargon sparingly.**
3. **Use slang appropriate to the listeners and to the situation.**
4. **Use inclusive language.**
5. **Use non-offensive language.**

A QUESTION OF ETHICS

One day Heather, Terry, Paul, and Martha stopped at the Student Union Grill before their next class. After they had talked about their class for a few minutes, the conversation shifted to students who were taking the class.

"By the way," Paul said, "do any of you know Fatty?"

"Who?" the group responded in unison.

"The really fat guy who was sitting a couple of seats from me. We've been in a couple of classes together—he's a pretty nice guy."

"What's his name?" Heather asked.

"Carl—but he'll always be Fatty to me."

"Do you call him that to his face?" Terry asked.

"Aw, I'd never say anything like that to him—I wouldn't want to hurt his feelings."

"Well," Martha chimed in, "I'd sure hate to think that you'd call me 'skinny' or 'the bitch' when I wasn't around."

"Come on—what's with you guys?" Paul retorted. "You trying to tell me that you never talk about another person that way when they aren't around?"

"Well," said Terry, "maybe a couple of times—but I've never talked like that about someone I really like."

"Someone you like?" queried Heather. "Why does that make a difference? Do you mean it's OK to trash-talk someone so long as you don't like the person?"

1. Sort out the ethical issues in this case. How ethical is it to call a person you supposedly like by an unflattering name that you would never use if that person were in your presence?

2. From an ethical standpoint, is whether you like a person what determines when such name-calling is OK?